

ASAP of VT

Association of Student Assistance Professionals of Vermont

"Bridging the Gap between Prevention and Treatment"

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What are Student Assistance Programs?

Student assistance programs can take two forms: student assistance teams and student assistance counselors. Some schools have both a counselor and support team. As of 1995, there were 103 schools with SAP teams, with SAP counselors and 26 with both.

According to the Student Assistance Counselor Network(6), SAP teams are composed of school personnel such as administrators, guidance counselors, teachers, school nurses, and a member who is certified and supervised by an addictions counselor. An SAP counselor is a certified or licensed alcohol and drug counselor, and may be a school employee or an employee of an outside agency which contracts with the school. SAP counselors are required to have 6,000 hours of supervised work in alcohol and drug abuse, and have on-going clinical supervision. In addition, SAP counselors who are licensed must have a masters degree in a human services field.

*"You've taught me
some of the
greatest things I
know. Thank you" -
- Vermont student*

What do SAP's do?

SAP counselors and teams identify students with substance use problems, intervene, and when necessary, refer them to community agencies for more specialized or intensive services. Since SAP counselors and teams are continually interacting with students, they can identify students having problems through direct observation. Students may also be referred to counselors by teachers, parents, peers, or may seek help themselves. The counselors then screen the students and may refer them to local human service agencies for formal assessment and treatment. SAP teams and counselors follow-up with students to ensure they obtain the treatment they need.

SAP counselors and teams also:

- give educational presentations to students and community groups
- work with community resources to develop services for students
- train school staff to deal with troubled students
- meet with concerned families
- increase awareness of substance use problems in the community
- allow teachers to concentrate on education instead of having to deal with substance use
- run educational support groups

SAP's complement existing programs such as school-based health clinics, classroom substance abuse prevention curricula, peer leadership programs, and community mental health agencies.

SAP counselors must not have other positions in the school that could cause confusion to the student or have different confidentiality and reporting requirements. For instance, a guidance counselor or school nurse may not also be a student assistance counselor.

While much of the work the SAP does is with the student they are also very involved in the school faculty, training of professionals, community organizations and community coalitions. Each SAP responds to the needs of their own school/communities needs based on local data.

For additional program information, please refer to the Vermont Associations of Student Assistance Professionals website: www.asap-vt.org (this site), 802-456-1100, or email Debby Haskins @ asapvt@sover.net and the National Association of Student Assistance Professionals website: <http://www.nasap.org/index2.html>

"Thanks for breaking my shell and letting me speak." Vermont Student

What Is the rationale for SAP's?

Surveys indicate that students who have problems with tobacco, alcohol or other drugs, are most likely to turn to a friend for help, but are also willing to talk to school personnel or counselors.(3) However, many school personnel are not trained to deal with substance abuse problems. SAP's provide someone who is trained and able to help students who turn to them.

The SAP's are modeled after employee assistance programs (EAP's). EAP's were originally created as employers recognized the detrimental effects of substance abuse on their employees and on productivity. At the same time, research was beginning to demonstrate that substance abuse treatment was effective in reducing employer costs and increasing worker performance. EAP's were developed using in-house counselors to provide early intervention and treatment for substance abuse or other personal problems. EAP's have been shown to decrease:

- absenteeism
- disciplinary actions
- grievances
- on-the-job accidents and visits to medical units
- worker's compensation payments.(7)

EAP's are not only effective, they are also cost effective. By one estimate, each dollar invested in an EAP returns from \$3 to \$15 in increased efficiency and productivity.(8) Companies such as McDonnell Douglas estimate a minimum of 4:1 savings-to-investment return for employee assistance counselors, which saves companies millions of dollars.(9)

Like EAP's, student assistance programs provide on-site support for substance use and related problems. But in addition, SAP's are designed to address the specific developmental needs of adolescents. Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller's(10) research on children's ability to cope with stress or "resiliency", has found that successful school prevention programs:

- strengthen the ties between the student or family and the community

- teach the students "life" skills such as how to make good decisions
- set and consistently reinforce expectations, such as school policies.

A student assistance program can help meet these goals because the counselor is a liaison between students, the school, and community mental health agencies. The counselors help the students follow through on referrals and help them make better choices regarding alcohol or other drug use. Counselors help the students maintain a norm of non-use and help them resist the pressure to use. When a school has an SAP counselor or team, the community is sending a message to students that drug use is a primary concern, and that help is available.

Finally, an SAP counselor supports school staff to make consistent enforcement choices around drug use policies.

"You have really helped me make some tough decisions [that] I wouldn't have been able to do alone" --Vermont Student

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